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UNLESS WE PLAN NOW

# Our towns

by Elizabeth E. Halton

'Defeat of Hitlerism is necessary so that there may be freedom; but this war, like the last war, will produce nothing but destruction unless we prepare for the future now, unless we plan now for the better world we mean to build.' FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

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**HANDBOOKS FOR DISCUSSION GROUPS**

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## PREFACE

The object of this series of pamphlets is to encourage, and to aid, organised discussion of the social, economic and political problems, which have arisen or are arising out of the war. That is to say, they are intended for use by the discussion circles, debating societies and the like which are springing up in bodies such as H.M. Forces, Civil Defence Workers, Youth Groups, Church Groups, and Women's Societies. They are simply written, but the issues with which they deal have not, we hope, been unduly simplified. One of our pamphlets deals with the setting up and efficient running of such groups.

We believe that we have succeeded in finding writers who are thoroughly qualified to expound their subjects. Each of them has been asked to remember that his function is not to provide propaganda for any particular plan or doctrine, but to place before his readers the principal facts and points of view that must be taken into account if any agreed solution is to be found. Our authors have also been asked to base their approach upon the good of the community as a whole, rather than on the interests of any section, however sympathetic to them.

In order that these standards should be maintained the draft of every pamphlet has been scrutinised by an editorial committee. But the opinions expressed in them remain those of the writers, and must not be taken to commit the Association as a whole.

Finally, with world opinion divided as it is to-day, some idealistic bias is unavoidable. We advocate democracy, and further we stand for what, generally speaking, our enemies in this war attack under the name of humanitarianism. By this we mean that men and women cannot be regarded merely as cogs in a machine of government, or as the instruments of a leader's will; on the contrary, they are possessed of fundamental rights both as individuals exercising freedom of judgment, and as citizens entitled to play an active part in the conduct of affairs.

And it follows from this—or so it seems to us—that a corresponding duty devolves upon the community as a whole. That duty is to secure for its members the fullest development of which they are capable in both these capacities, and at the same time to train them in respect for the equal rights and freedom of others. It is becoming daily clearer that this must entail changes in many social arrangements and assumptions, and we hope that this series of pamphlets will play some small part in ensuring that these changes are faced not with hostility and reluctance, but in an atmosphere of co-operation and good-will.

# OUR TOWNS

<p><i>Key to Reference Marks in Text :</i> Numbers refer to Books. Capital letters refer to Exhibitions. Small letters refer to Films.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

In London the sirens were sounding. Their wail had been growing increasingly familiar to Londoners during the past few weeks. In the provinces, on the coast and in the Midlands, the inhabitants could boast already that they knew what real bombing meant. But on Saturday, September 8th, 1940, German bombers flew up the Thames Estuary and called forth flames from the wharfs and warehouses that lit the sky for many miles. The Battle of London had begun.

It might equally have been called the Battle of the Homes. For though Hitler aimed at the airfields, at the docks, and at the industrial life of the country, to the passer-by it was the residential areas that bore the scars. No homes were ignored, from Buckingham Palace to the crowded, two-storey, century-old cottages of dockland, from congested city dwellings to remote country cottages. The bitterness of those nightly wounds is too near for impartial judgment, yet when they can be seen in perspective it is possible that Hitler may be accused of launching, not an attack against England, but the biggest town-planning scheme ever attempted in this country.

Is this suggestion too fantastic? Let us examine it and see.

### 1. The Need to Rebuild <sup>1</sup>.

First, his bombers have caused an increasingly urgent need to rebuild. We do not even yet know to what extent this need will reach. But even if we could be sure that no more damage will be done it would still mean that a large number of people will need new homes built for

them to replace their former ones. Rebuilding, then, on a large scale, has been forced on us after the War.

## 2. Construction v. Destruction

Secondly, a natural reaction to the sight of destruction is construction. After the first shock of seeing something that was once a building turned into a heap of dust and bricks and slats and beams, comes the thought, "What shall be put in its place? Shall it be that poky, insanitary cottage that was there before? Shall it be that barrack of cement in its concrete surround? Shall it be a building at all? How much nicer those other buildings look now there is space around them. How lovely to have that expanse of sky between the buildings. Supposing it were left just like that and turned into a garden? Supposing it were grass, and the children from the houses round could play cricket on it? Supposing . . . ."

In other words, secondly, Hitler has made us start to plan, to wonder whether, even if our own homes have not been bombed, the old arrangement was really the best one, or whether it could be improved.

## 3. Moving the Immovable<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, the impossible has been made to happen. Before the war, to suggest to a business man that he might take his business or his factory away from the town into the country would be to get the reply that you didn't know what you were talking about; that it was impossible; that it would mean isolation from clients, from other businesses on which his was dependent, from transport, and so on.

Now, however, the deeper you can hide your business or your factory in the country the more successful you are considered to be. Business firms have moved from the heart of London, carrying their documents with them. New factories have been built in isolated districts, where no sign of them can be seen even from the air. Evacuation is the fashion. Whether, if its name were changed to Decentralisation, it would be as popular

remains to be seen. But at least it has been proved that what was said to be impossible is in fact perfectly possible, that the immobile was mobile all the time.

#### 4. Transport<sup>3. 4.</sup>

Fourthly, the problem of transport has been enhanced *ad absurdum*, so that it has drawn an attention to itself which cannot be ignored. Many people have for long been accustomed to travelling miles to and from their work, but they were a minority, so it was possible to forget them. Now, not only are more people doing this, but travelling itself is more difficult, and it was not uncommon during the more acute days of crisis in the autumn of 1940 to hear people say, in the course of their half-hour journey which took three hours: "All this travelling. It seems so silly. Nancy was saying only yesterday—there she lives in Battersea and has to cross the river every day to work in Tottenham. And there's Freda works all day in Battersea, and yet she has to come all the way from Hampstead to do it. We'll have to alter all that after the war. There's no sense in it."

There never has been. But it's taken a war to bring it home to us.

#### 5. "... nor Iron Bars a Cage"

And we have discovered something else. It is not a new handbox of a house that makes a home, nor a splendid new building of concrete and glass that makes a community centre. No snug sitting-room with comfortable chairs by the fireside, no well-equipped canteens, gymnasiums and libraries, no spacious meeting rooms and lecture halls greet the shelterers from Hitler's bombs. Yet there, in those bunk-crowded structures below the ground, an atmosphere prevails of neighbourliness, of companionability, of *esprit de corps*, that any public school might envy. "We've never missed a night since last September" is a favourite boast, and few would change their shelter for another, no matter what attractions were offered.

How does this happen? Why was this community spirit so difficult to arouse before the war? Why should

it have sprung up and endured in conditions so unfavourable? Can it be kept up when the war is over, or will it die away again? Here indeed is food for thought.

## 6. Two Foreign Races<sup>5</sup>—A

And lastly, the discovery has been made that in our island we have bred two races foreign to one another, with tastes and standards strange and dissimilar, with habits new and unaccustomed: the people that live in the country, and the people that live in the big towns. Many of the city children, moved to the country for the first time in their lives, had never seen green fields and hedges, cows, pigs, cocks and hens, vegetables from the earth, not from a tin. But they have seen them now. They will not forget. Nor will the countryman forget the revealing glimpses of town conditions that he has gleaned from his visitors.

Will those two races ever again be so apart? Will the children who have consorted for two or three years with space and air and light be content with the restrictions of their narrow, treeless streets? Will any of us, indeed, forced for once to see the year through in the country, be willing to forgo the adventure of its seasons' transformations?

War conditions have brought together the two foreign races and shown them that one is dependent on the other. What effect will this have on the reconstruction of our towns?

## WHAT DO WE WANT ?

Our recent experiences, then, have done much to remove prejudices, and to draw attention to some of the illogicalities of our way of living. This should make easier our task of rebuilding. Old restrictions will have gone. But are we sure what we want to rebuild? What should the towns of the future be like?

Let us plan our Ideal Town, and see what we really want. We shall certainly not get it unless we know what it is.

## OUR IDEAL TOWN <sup>6</sup>—B

### I. Position

Where shall we build Our Town? <sup>7</sup>

The answer seems obvious. We shall build it in lovely country, with hills and woods nearby, and not too far from the sea, in case we want to bathe in the summer.

Is it as simple as all that? Let us look at one or two points.

<sup>8</sup>Supposing the site we choose is good agricultural soil. Nowadays we talk a lot about digging for victory, but you want if possible to dig the kind of soil that will grow food. In England only about 18 per cent. of the land is suitable for really intensive agriculture. That is not much. But if we build on some of the 18 per cent. we shall be reducing our food production still more. We have made this mistake in the past. If you drive out of London towards Slough down the Great West Road you will see many miles of clustering little houses all built on some of the most fertile agricultural soil in the country. We are in fact losing the richest soil to the towns at a rate of 35,000 acres or more a year.

<sup>9</sup>We must be careful then that we are not building Our Town on land that is more suited to some other purpose. But there is something more to be considered when we choose our site.

We want to live in this town. We don't want only to sleep in it and go to work in another one. And we don't want only to work in it, and to sleep somewhere else. For then we should be falling into the old trouble of long and expensive journeys to and from work.

But if we want to work in Our Town it means that it must contain factories and businesses. Now these factories and businesses will need easy access to the markets where they can sell their goods, or buy materials to make their goods, or get customers for their businesses. So Our Town must be able to be linked up by road or rail or river with other places.

This has always been an important point in making a town, for you will notice that, in olden days, when the

chief means of transport was by water, the towns were trading centres built on the coast and by the banks of navigable rivers, while later on they spread around the railways.

For our site, therefore, we must choose a position that does not use up land more needed for other purposes, and one that can be easily linked with other places.

## 2. Size <sup>10</sup>. (a)

How big shall Our Town be?

We shall probably all agree that London and other big cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, are too large. We have spoken of the two Foreign Races. Is it any wonder they are foreign to each other when it takes so long to get from the heart of a big city to the real country?

Think what a big city means. It means that you must travel to get to work, travel to get to the country, travel to get to your exercise, travel to get to concerts and theatres, travel to see your friends, travel in crowded vehicles, breathing used up air, standing on someone else's feet, and paying a large fare to do so.

Think what a big city means. It means that the workers of a family have little time at home except on Sundays. It means they are almost strangers to the children. It means that they may add as much as two hours to their working-day. What is the good of reducing working hours if you add to them again by the time it takes to get to and from your work?

Think what a big city means. It means death every 80 seconds on the roads. It means traffic delay, which, in London, is estimated to cost £25,000,000 a year. Twenty-five million pounds. Who pays for it? We do, in our fares, and in the prices of the goods that are brought to us by this expensive method.

Dear, dear, you say, let us keep Our Town very small.

But how small? If it is only a big village it would be impossible to provide secondary schools, colleges, theatres, good concerts, big libraries, interesting meetings, churches for all denominations, because there would not

be enough people to make these worth while. You would, in fact, be cut off from the very amenities that have urged men of recent years to drift to the towns in order to get the best opportunities of education, medical and surgical treatment, mental recreation, and prospects of advancement.

What size shall it be then? London has a population of nearly nine million. Liverpool of nearly nine hundred thousand. York of ninety thousand. Exeter of sixty-six thousand. How big is your nearest town? Would you like it to be bigger or smaller? What towns do you know with a population, say, of 250,000? Of 100,000? Of 50,000? And which one seems the best size?

### 3. Appearance <sup>11. 12.</sup>

#### (a) The Buildings

Our Town must of course look beautiful. That goes without saying. But how is beauty achieved in a town? Go and study your own town or village. What is it that makes some parts of it look beautiful, while others look hideous? Why does that monotonous crescent of houses all alike, austere, aloof, dignified, old as the Adam brothers, give perpetual pleasure to your eye? Why does that collection of cottages, adorned, full of variety, cocksure and impudent, grate restlessly upon your mind? What makes a factory look inspiring, majestic, appropriate. Why do you linger in one road and turn thankfully out of another? Unless we analyse these things we cannot have a beautiful town, for we shall not know what to ask for.

You will probably find that the appearance of a town depends chiefly on two factors: the relation of its buildings to one another, and the materials with which they are made.

The first factor is a question of space and layout and design. That bit in your own town or village, where there is a cottage like a box, two chicken-runs, some allotments, a bit of waste land, and three more cottages with no connection to each other, is ugly because it has no

design, no reason, and is badly laid out. That crescent we spoke of, on the other hand, where the houses were all alike, catches the eye as a whole, as one unit. Each house merges its personality into the next one, and plays for the team, not for itself. The factory that you like is probably not only a fine building, but it has space round it worthy of its size; while the other factory that you don't like has perhaps got buildings too near it, or ones which are unsuitable to its neighbourhood.

A collection of cottages, however, may not only be ugly because it is laid out in no particular pattern and fights with its neighbours. Each individual cottage may also be ugly because a number of different materials have been used on it: bricks, timber, cement, which gives it a fussy look, like someone who has tried to put on all their best clothes and jewellery at once, without thinking whether they match or not.

We shall need to be particular about this question of materials, for besides being simple and good, they must match the countryside. How exactly right look the stone cottages of Dorset, but in London they might look out of place. Yet when you come across a row of brick cottages in a village of stone they look like foreigners who have strayed in and can't learn the language.

### (b) The Roads <sup>13</sup>.

If we have a beautiful town its approaches must be beautiful, too. Not for Our Town those sordid outskirts which herald so many straggling suburbs that we know. Let us keep the approaches to Our Town completely rural, so that our visitors can sweep right up to it from any direction, along a parkway free from advertisements and hen-coops, and sprawls of tawdry bungalows. We do not want to think whose pills will help our defects, whose tyres will suit our cars, or even what beer is good for us. We want to see Our Town, compact and complete, dawn upon us in its beauty as we round a bend. Moreover, we have already arranged to link it freely for business purposes with other towns. Let us therefore build one-way roads, with untouched country at their sides. Once outside Our Town we are in the country.

The streets within Our Town are a different matter. They serve a slower, more intimate purpose, and must look their part. But even so there is no reason why they need be drab or treeless. Study the main streets of your own town, those with trees and those without. What kind of trees would you plant? Will you have grass verges between the trees? And where will you park your cars?

### (c) The Open Spaces

Although we are probably making Our Town of a size that will enable us to reach the country easily, we shall want to have some open space inside it. What form shall this take? Shall it be a park, like Hyde Park or St. James's Park in London? Or shall it be gardens, like the London Squares? Or shall it be wedges of country, penetrating spear-like into the city? This would mean that we could walk into the country through country. There are towns in Norway, for example, where these wedges are so arranged that people can ski in winter or walk in summer from the heart of the city into the mountains.

### 4. Types of Buildings <sup>14</sup>.—C D

It takes all sorts to make a town, so we must provide all sorts of buildings for them. Let us take four examples of people, and see what sort of building they will want to live in: the Smiths, the Browns, the Jones', and the Robinsons.

<sup>15, 16</sup> The Smiths are a large family, whose children are all under 14, and Mr. Smith earns only a small wage. The Smith children make plenty of noise and want plenty of room. What type of dwelling will suit the Smiths best? Hardly a flat, where their noise will disturb the neighbours. It looks as if they would want a house with a garden, and not too large a rent.

The Browns, on the other hand, have three children all earning, and Mr. Brown has risen to the top of his job and gets a very good salary. They can afford to pay a good rent, and to have a spacious and comfortable home. They like a house with a garden, too, but for

different reasons. How spacious shall their house be? Shall they have two sitting-rooms as well as their kitchen? Or does this mean too much work for Mrs. Brown, who is getting on, and is left alone all day to do the house-work?

Young Miss and Mr. Jones are out at work all day and dance most of the night. They share a dwelling, but are never in it except to sleep and have their breakfast. Obviously they need a place as small, compact and easy to run as possible. What about a flat? If you decide on this, how high shall the whole block of flats be, and shall it be set in a garden?

17. Finally we come to the old Robinsons, Mr. Robinson, who boasts he will not see 80 again, and Mrs. Robinson, 77, and rather rheumatic. A house with stairs is too much for them to keep clean. Which would they prefer if they could choose? A small bungalow, or a well-planned flat on the ground floor of the Jones's block? Do they want a bed-room and a sitting-room and a kitchen, or all three rolled into one? Ask them and see.

Besides different types of dwellings, we shall need different types of workplaces, for some people work in factories, some in offices, some in shops, some in engineering industries, and so on. How can all these types of buildings be made to look appropriate and well placed? Shall we put each type by itself in one part of the town, or disperse them among each other, and among the residential areas? What about the smoky factories?

As you look more and more into the subject, you begin to see how important it is that a town should be planned, and planned as a whole, and how easy it has been in the past, when anyone could build any type of building he fancied anywhere, whether it fitted with the surroundings or not, to get the congestion, confusion and muddle we know so well to-day.

## 5. The Common Touch <sup>18</sup>.

Here, then, stands Our Town, on carefully-chosen ground, proportioned and spacious and suited to all types, visible from its parkway approaches in graciousness and

simplicity. But as yet it is a shell. It is a city without a soul; a town but not a neighbourhood. How shall we bring it alive? What must we do to create in it that elusive community spirit, which prevails so strongly in the discomfort of the shelters, and refuses to be kindled in surroundings that provide every encouragement? Let us analyse the situation and see if we can discover the secret.

The shelters provide a common meeting-ground where the attendance is regular and enforced, with a common purpose: that of saving lives. The same thing has been provided in the past—and may yet be again—by the Church, another common meeting-ground, where attendance was regular and enforced, and the purpose to save souls. Behind these outward signs in the shelters lurks the zest for life, the craving for companionship that danger brings, and the cementing ties of unity against a common enemy.

How can we re-create this spirit when the circumstances that produce it have disappeared?

Two factors suggest themselves: first, that Our Town must have keen and vigorous citizens, and secondly, that as many common purposes as possible must be provided.

It is not easy in a congested city, despairingly squalid and ill-planned, and so vast that it is difficult to know as much as one-fiftieth of it, to produce citizens who will take a constructive interest in its welfare. But Our Town will be small enough for its citizens to know it well, and the fact that it is beautiful and serene will help to produce a civic pride, and a perpetual desire to make it still more perfect. We have learnt in the last two years more of the duties of citizenship, and more of civic machinery, than we ever knew before, since, in our work as Wardens, A.F.S., Ambulance and Casualty Services, we have come into touch with our neighbours, gained their confidence and a knowledge of their troubles and conditions, studied the intricacies of the local services: water, gas, electricity, fire; and come in contact with the local officials. Shall we lose at once this sense of responsibility for our neighbourhood, or will our new knowledge serve us well in Reconstruction?

Of common purposes there must be many in Our

Town. Churches, of whose effect we have already spoken. Education, to provide for all needs from two to seventy: nursery schools, elementary, central, secondary, and technical schools, colleges, and facilities for lectures and adult education, for reading and for borrowing books. Physical activities, providing for games and sport of all kinds. Artistic opportunities, in picture galleries, museums, concerts, theatres and cinemas. Creative pursuits, in acting, painting, gardening, orchestras. Social life, in clubs of every variety. And, of course, domestic needs in the shops and markets.

## 6. Interior <sup>19</sup>.

All we have left to do now is to plan the interiors of Our Town, to furnish and to decorate them, to heat and to light them.

There must be light and air from plenty of windows in our homes, and if we have planned well we shall see from them the sun and the sky. Although there must be space for everyone, for we do not want to revert to the bad days of overcrowding, it must be planned space and planned economically. We do not, for example, want the living-room at one end of a long passage and the kitchen at the other, and we shall have to consider the kind of family for whom we are planning.

What should the furniture and decorations be like? Paint or paper? Light walls to make the rooms look big, or dark walls to hide the finger-marks? The old big furniture, handed down from grandpa, with lots of carving to collect the dust, or new small furniture, plain and well-designed?

We shall presumably light by electricity, but how shall we provide warmth? We want to keep Our Town as clean as possible, so we must abolish smoke. It is said that, as a nation, every man, woman and child pays on an average the sum of £2 a year in "smoke tax." These figures are based only on the costs of the excessive amount of washing and cleaning that is needed, of wear and tear resulting in damage to buildings, and of inconvenience caused by fog. They do not take into account

the vast losses due to ill health in respiratory diseases. But the bulk of the smoke of our towns in this country does not come from factories and industries. Over three-quarters of it is emitted by the domestic grate.

20. Can we then in Our Town arrange for a system that will provide hot water and warmth for everyone by means of central heating? In certain towns in America and in Russia, in France and in Scotland, there is a central heating supply for all buildings in the town, whether business or private, houses or flats. Run on a large enough scale this is economically possible.

## 7. The Old Towns (b)

We can now move into our New Town and settle down. But what about the old one we have left behind? What about all the towns which, damaged by bombing, or ruined with bad planning, are left to the mercy of those who cannot move from them? Do we leave them to decay?

No. Here surely lies our supreme opportunity. Before the war it might have been difficult, and would certainly have been lengthy, to open out and re-plan the centres of cities containing buildings with many years of life, but now the need to re-plan has been forced upon us in many cases by destruction. Now that we have thinned out the population by providing our new town, we can set to work to rebuild our old one on a more open and less congested scale.

How would you replan your own neighbourhood? That slum area near the docks, which has been so badly damaged, must it be slums again? Could you make a park there, and a river front to walk along and enjoy? Could you arrange for people who work on the docks to live on one side of that park, with their own shops at hand, and with schools in the park so that the children need not cross main roads to get to them? Do you want to pull down all the buildings that have been left standing? Or are some of them old and beautiful and worthy of being kept? If so how will you show these to the best advantage?

(c) Or again if you live in a village how best can you preserve its character? Do you want to keep it compact and complete, or are you content to allow it to grow by straggling out into the countryside with houses unsuited to their surroundings? Do you feel it might suitably be developed into a small town, of the kind we have just built, or do you wish to keep it the size it is? Much can be done to preserve its old dwellings by reconditioning. In 1926 an Act was passed which provided a grant under certain conditions to any landlord who could not otherwise afford to put his out-of-date cottages in good repair, and the Housing Act of 1938 provided a special subsidy for rural housing. Have these Acts been made use of in your village?

<sup>E</sup> Could you not make a survey of your neighbourhood, with maps to show its geography, a brief account of its past history, and details of its population, its industrial, economic and social conditions? This would be a useful guide not only to you, to enable you to decide what you want, but even to the experts, who must base their planning on known facts.

## FROM DREAMS TO REALITY

We have planned, then, our ideal town. But can we really have towns like this, or is this merely an occupation for a wet afternoon? Two big difficulties will have occurred to us already:

1. How can we control its growth and keep the country round it free from building?

2. How can we afford it? Will not the cost of all this work be so high that the rents in Our Town will be too big for the average working man?

### 1. Control<sup>2</sup>

#### (a) The Plan Must Be National

The answer to the first problem seems to be that the plan must be not for one town only, but for the whole country. This idea is not a new one. A few people have

thought it necessary for many years, and recently it has been gaining popularity.

“In July, 1937, a Royal Commission was set up to inquire into the distribution of the industrial population. It was asked to find out where people lived and worked, and why, and what effect it was having on their health and happiness. Every member of the Commission came unanimously to the conclusion that a national plan was necessary, and that a central authority should be set up to deal with the whole country.

### (b) The Right To Build

But if we have a national plan, who is to carry it out? What about the people who own land, who might say: “Mind your own business. This is my land and I shall do just what I jolly well please.”

Somehow or other, we shall have to get control of the right to develop our country in the best possible way, not only any bit of the countryside, but also any bit inside the old towns, otherwise we shall never be able to carry out our national plan, and we shall have a worse muddle than ever. Such a right sounds, perhaps, rather as if we were trying to assume the powers of Hitler. So we are. With one difference. There is only one of Hitler. There are forty-six million of us.

We must, however, be specially careful that this control is used wisely. We must give a great deal of thought, both to the methods we use, and to the kind of people we entrust with the task.

At the present time public control over building is exercised by Local Authorities under by-laws, by local planning authorities under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 and the Restriction of Ribbon Development Act of 1935, and by the Ministry of Works and Buildings and certain other Government Departments under the Emergency Defence Regulations. These powers do actually enable local planning authorities to exercise control by making planning schemes, but one planning authority by itself is often too weak financially or in its administration to operate these schemes efficiently. Some

authorities are co-operating by forming joint committees, and these combinations could be enlarged and co-ordinated within regions such as we now have for Civil Defence, and we could make a Central Planning Authority responsible for directing their plans. The nucleus of such a Central Authority came into being as a Council of three Ministers: the Minister for Works and Buildings, the Minister of Health, and the Secretary of State for Scotland. Recently, however, the planning section of the Ministry of Health has been transferred to the Ministry of Works and Buildings, which is now to be called the Ministry of Works and Planning, and this is a further step in the development of a Central Planning Authority.

Another alternative would be to allow the Local Authorities to buy the land in and round their towns, so that, being the landlord, they would be able to say to what use it should be put. Obviously this alternative would have to be under the control of a Central Planning Authority also, otherwise municipal landlords might raise the same difficulties with reference to national planning as private landlords do with reference to local planning.

Or we could say, "From Monday next all the land of this country belongs to the nation," which would make the nation the landlord. In this case responsibility for Ministry of Health was transferred to the Ministry of Works and Buildings, which is now called the Ministry of Works and Planning, and this is a further step in the development of a Central Planning Authority.

What kind of body would best carry out the work—the stupendous task—of reconstructing our country as we want it reconstructed? Is it a good thing for Councils, who are political bodies dependent on votes, to have control over big areas of land and be the landlords of a great number of people? If you prefer a non-political body, how shall the people on it be chosen? How can we be sure they are the kind of people who will build our towns as we want them built, and reconstruct our cities as we should like them reconstructed? And how can we keep in our hands the power to choose such people, and to dismiss them if they are not doing what we want?

## 2. Cost

The second difficulty was "How can we afford it?" Let us think first how we can afford it individually, and then how we can afford it as a community.

### (a) Cost to the Individual

As we built our town, with all its comforts and amenities, the thought must have passed through our minds: "Yes, and what will the rents be?" What means are there for reducing rents to a level which comes within the reach of the lower-paid worker? Let us look at three which have been used during the last twenty years.

i. Subsidies<sup>16</sup> Until 1919 the building of low-rented houses had been possible without help from the central Government. The great bulk of these houses had been built by private enterprise out of its own pocket, but a few had been built by Local Authorities out of the proceeds of the rates. After that date building costs rose to such proportions that it was necessary to stimulate this type of building by means of a grant or subsidy. In all Housing Acts after 1919 this feature was present in some form or other, sometimes given to private enterprise, sometimes to local authorities, sometimes according to the number of people rehoused, sometimes according to the cost of the land or the building. In the most recent Housing Act of 1938 subsidies were given on the same basis for slum clearance as for the abatement of overcrowding, and they were given according to the price of the land, so that a higher subsidy was given for flats which were built in the centre of a city where land was expensive, than for a cottage on the outskirts where it was cheaper. Thus the financial help given from the Exchequer and the rates towards the expense of flats built on a central site might average approximately £27 a flat, while for a cottage on the outskirts it would come to only about £8 5s. 0d.

ii. Rent Rebates<sup>21</sup> Although these subsidies enabled the landlord to charge a lower rent than he could otherwise have done, the rents even then did not always come

within the means of the lower-paid workers, particularly those with large families of small children. Some other method had to be adopted to make it possible for these to live in suitable places where they were not overcrowded, and a system of adapting the rent to suit the income of the tenant was sanctioned by Parliament in the 1930 Housing Act, and more fully in the Act of 1936. It is suggested in these Acts that the subsidy is intended for the tenant who needs it for as long as he needs it, and that it should not be used indiscriminately for all municipal houses regardless of the income of their tenants.

This method is called the system of rent rebates or differential renting, the idea being that the rent paid shall be adjusted to the income of the tenant, and the number of people he has to keep on that income. These rebates can therefore be arranged in different ways. The most usual way is to deduct a certain amount, say 6d. or 1/-, from the weekly rent for each child in the family who is not earning.

iii. Rent Restrictions <sup>22.23</sup>. All these precautions against too high rents do not, however, prevent a private landlord from raising the rent of his house to an exorbitant degree when there is a shortage of housing accommodation. This was what happened in the last war of 1914 to 1918, and a series of laws had to be made to restrict profiteering in rents. These laws culminated in the Act of 1920, which, prolonged and amended several times, has continued until the beginning of this war. The objects of these Rents Acts were to restrict increases of rent, and to give the tenants some protection against eviction. On September 1st, 1939, the Government, not to be caught a second time, passed another law, ordering that these acts were to continue in force until six months after the end of the emergency, and including in the classes of houses that were controlled by the acts all those with a rateable value on April 6th, 1939, of £75 or less in England and Wales, and not more than £100 in the Metropolitan Police District and the City of London.

## (b) Cost to the Community

1. Building the Town. Do these three efforts to keep rents down to a reasonable figure in proportion to wages succeed in reaching the root of the trouble, or are they only patchwork? Do they cure the disease, or do they only alleviate the pain?

To build such a town as we have described is clearly very costly. First, we have to procure the land to build it on. This will mean either buying it, or paying to the owners a sum which will compensate them for having to put it to a different use from the one for which they intended it when they bought it. How much should the owners be paid? The price they gave for the land? The value of the land at the beginning of this war or at the end of it? The value it might have had after it had been built up and developed as the owner intended? Probably the owner would want this last value, because it would be the highest. But has he any right to this increased value? How much of it would be due to his own effort, and how much to the work of his neighbours, who are the community at large, the people who have built and opened up that street, say of shops, who have made the roads, dug the drains, laid the electric wires and gas pipes, started the buses, and actually made the property valuable?

This problem of compensation, and the question of how much should be paid for the improvement or betterment of the land, is a big problem, and a Committee known as the Uthwatt Committee, from the name of its Chairman, has been appointed to consider it.

Next comes the question of the building costs. These costs have been very high since the last war, but it is possible that if more research could be made into the subject some way could be found to reduce them. Owing to shortage of materials at the present time such research is going on now, and some good may therefore come out of what is at present a problem of the war.

These two items, the land and the buildings, will, it is true, cost a lot of money. But we have at the present time to contribute in rates and taxes towards the high subsidies

that are given for buildings in the centres of our congested towns. To house a family in the centre of a large town the State and the Local Authority may be paying up to £39 a year in subsidy. To the rates and taxes must be added the cost of transport of goods delayed by traffic congestion, the cost of the results of smoke and noise to the health of the people, and the danger to life on the roads; while any small job, such as street widening for example, in the centre of a large town, will cost as much as two million pounds a mile. Moreover, the longer we allow this muddle to continue the higher these costs will become.

The question is therefore, not can we afford to rebuild, but can we afford not to rebuild? Would it be better for our future welfare and happiness to allow land costs and building costs, travel costs and health costs, to continue to go up and up, or would it be better to save all these indirect costs, and use them for the building of new or reconstructed towns?

ii. Maintaining the Town<sup>24.25</sup>. It would be an extravagance indeed to build a town such as ours and then do nothing about keeping it in good repair. The streets will have to be lighted and kept clean; the parks and gardens planted and tended. Although much of this is the work of the local authority services it is not entirely their responsibility. For if the inhabitants of Our Town leave litter about the streets and gardens, and trample down the flower beds, it will not only spoil its beauty, but will add to the expense of maintenance. Shall we put railings round our open spaces, or shall we trust the inhabitants and their children to respect and care for their town as their proud possession?

Besides maintaining the outside of the town we shall have to keep the inside of the buildings in good repair, and to do this we may have to help the people who, from having lived so long in the squalor and discomfort of the slums, are unable to take advantage of the new standards. Even though the days of "coal in the bath" may be over, it is perfectly possible still for tenants, unused to plenty of water, heat and light, to quickly

spoil a dwelling. We do not want the work and money spent on the interiors of our new town to be in vain. How can we prevent this?

The answer lies in skilled housing management, which must be a feature of great importance in the maintenance of our town once it is built. Management in this case does not mean only looking after bricks and mortar, drains and paintwork. It means sympathetic attention to the human being for whom those bricks and mortar have been made into a habitation.

One of the best-known systems of housing management is the one founded by Octavia Hill. She considered that the manager should be a trained woman who could unite in one person the duties of rent collector, repairs surveyor, and welfare worker. She felt that, as it was the housewife from whom the rent was generally received, it was easier for her to invite a woman into her home to discuss her difficulties, than a man, and that the collecting of rents gave the manager an official reason for her call, enabling her slowly to win the tenant's confidence.

## THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE <sup>18</sup>.

On the outbreak of war all building was stopped by the Defence Regulations, except what was required for war purposes under the authority of a Government Department, and any building operations costing more than £100 now require a licence from the Ministry of Works and Buildings.

What will happen at the end of the war when people who have no homes want them quickly and at once? If we build in a hurry we shall fall again into our old mistake of building without a plan. The Uthwatt Committee suggest that control on building should be continued for a reasonable time after the end of hostilities, until a national plan has been worked out.

This is where we can help, for we can form such a strong body of public opinion, that we can insist that control is continued. And we can persuade the people

who are naturally anxious to get settled homes again that it is worth waiting in temporary dwellings for another year or two until good homes in good neighbourhoods are planned and built.

We have a big responsibility, a responsibility to the future. We blame most bitterly the people who built in haste and without thought the back-to-back houses of the industrial revolution. But if we build again in haste and without thought that bitterness will be nothing to the blame we shall deserve from coming generations. For now is our chance. The land is ours to beautify or to ruin. The park walls are down. The high iron railings are in the foundry. We can step in and claim our heritage.<sup>26</sup>

Are we worthy of it?

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